

Moscow Said to Hint End Of Embargo at 1 Plant

Lithuanian Firm Also Serves Soviet Market

By Michael Dobbs
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VILNIUS, U.S.S.R., April 29—

Lithuanian energy officials said today that their Soviet counterparts had raised the possibility of increasing supplies of natural gas to a Lithuanian fertilizer plant despite a partial economic embargo ordered by the Kremlin.

The Kremlin imposed an 83 percent reduction in natural gas supplies to Lithuania earlier this month in an attempt to persuade the rebel Baltic republic to back down on its March 11 declaration of independence.

The Lithuanian government responded swiftly by drastically curtailing operations at energy-intensive fertilizer plants, which serve Soviet as well as Lithuanian customers.

Rumors of an imminent relaxation by the Kremlin circulated here today and were picked up by Radio Vilnius and Western news agencies. But telephone interviews with top Lithuanian energy officials provided little concrete evidence to support the reports.

Lithuanian Energy Minister Steponas Asmantas said that Moscow had provided no confirmation of an oral promise last Friday to increase gas supplies to the Azot fertilizer plant at Jonava, near the former Lithuanian capital of Kaunas.

Asmantas added that he doubted there would be an increase in supplies to the plant, which has been forced to shut down most operations.

The possibility of an increase in supplies was raised in a telephone conversation between the director of the plant and an unidentified Soviet energy official in Moscow, according to Asmantas. The minister said there had been no official negotiations between Moscow and Vilnius on the subject.

"It's probably a case of the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing," he said, adding that

Lithuania was currently receiving only 3.5 million cubic meters of gas out of its normal daily supply of 18.5.

The director of the Jonava plant, Bronislav Lubis, said he had been told that the allocation for this facility alone could be increased to 3.5 million cubic meters a day from the current .5 million, which would allow it to resume normal operations. However, he added that no official notification had been received.

"We won't know for sure what is going to happen until tomorrow," he said.

Even if the Jonava plant receives an extra allocation of natural gas, it would not necessarily mean that the Kremlin is relaxing its sanctions. It could merely signify that Soviet ministries wish to receive extra supplies of fertilizer from Lithuania.

To test the Kremlin's measures, Lithuanian Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene said Saturday that foreign oil tankers would attempt to enter the Lithuanian port of Klaipeda on May 12 and 14 with cargo for Lithuanian clients. It is not yet clear whether the Soviet navy, which controls access to the port, will allow the ships into Soviet territorial waters.

Several hundred residents of Vilnius took part today in a bicycle procession through the city to demonstrate that there are alternative means of transportation to the automobile. Lithuanians have been limited to 30 liters of gasoline a month, sharply reducing traffic.

This evening, tens of thousands of Lithuanians, including President Vytautas Landsbergis, gathered outside the main cathedral in Vilnius to hear Beethoven's Choral Symphony in celebration of Lithuania's proclaimed independence.

The crowds broke into chants of "Landsbergis, Landsbergis" and "Lithuania, Lithuania" at the end of the concert, singing patriotic hymns and waving the Lithuanian flag.